

50 Ways to Describe Your Gender

Do you remember the famous Paul Simon song “50 Ways to Leave Your Lover”? Well, Facebook is now giving you 50 ways to describe your gender.

Several years ago, Harvard University’s business school changed the gender choices on its online application from “Female, Male” to “Female, Male, Transgender.” But that was too limiting, so they changed it again to read “Female, Male, Undisclosed (specify below).”

And if this happened at Harvard, which was founded in 1636 to “train a literate clergy,” you can be sure it has been happening on lots of other campuses as well.

At Oberlin College, where Charles Finney once served as president, an ad for “Queer @ Oberlin,” posted online by Oberlin’s Multicultural Resource Center, listed 49 different expressions of sexual orientation or gender, including terms like *boidyke* and *fellagirly* and ending the list with “...” since 49 variants were not enough.

And more than 10 years ago, the Oberlin Student Cooperative Association (OSCA) decided that “all residence halls with three or more bathrooms would have bathrooms designated specifically for male, female, and non-gender specific. ... Also, all housing and dining co-ops with bathrooms must maintain at least one gender neutral bathroom at all times. OSCA will also be abandoning all references to biological sex and instead will use self-identified categories of gender in all internal and external paperwork.”

Did you catch that? For student housing, “all references to biological sex” were abandoned; instead, only “self-identified categories of gender” were used in all housing-related

paperwork. Yet if there is any part of a college student's paperwork where the question of biological sex is especially important, it is in the matter of student housing.

A 2007 report cites Dr. Barb Burdge, a professor of social work at Manchester University, who argues, "The current view of gender—the social construct of dividing humans in to male and female—is oppressive and should be rejected altogether."

The report says, "She believes that transgendered individuals—which includes a whole range of individuals—should be affirmed and considered to be gender variant, not suffering from gender identity disorders. These individuals include 'bigenders, gender radicals, butch lesbians, cross-dressing married men, transvestites, intersex individuals, transsexuals, drag kings and queens, gender-blenders, queers, genderqueers, two spirits, or he-shes.'"

And on and on it goes.

Is it any surprise, then, that Facebook has now announced its new policy? And is it any surprise that GLAAD, a major gay activist organization that has attempted to censor those with opposing views, helped Facebook implement these changes? GLAAD noted, "While the set of [50!] options is not comprehensive, the company will continue to work with LGBT organizations to improve the set of options and respond to user need."

Facebook users will actually be able to list as many as 10 different descriptions of their gender (simultaneously), using the new "custom gender" option.

As reported widely online, "Facebook said the changes, shared with The Associated Press before the launch on Thursday, initially cover the company's 159 million monthly users in the U.S. and are aimed at giving people more choices in how they describe themselves, such as androgynous, bi-gender, intersex, gender fluid or transsexual."

As stated by Facebook software engineer Brielle Harrison, “who worked on the project and is herself undergoing gender transformation, from male to female, ‘There’s going to be a lot of people for whom this is going to mean nothing, but for the few it does impact, it means the world.’”

Yes, for a small number of people this will mean the world, and as followers of Jesus we should do our best to understand the issues they face and meet them where they are with His compassion and grace.

And as bizarre as all this may sound to the vast majority of us, we cannot scorn the identity crises these people have struggled with, as if they just woke up one day and chose to be different. On the congregational level, we must be ready to help parents who are dealing with a child who is convinced that he or she has been born in the wrong body.

At the same, we must identify this for what it is: an emotional, psychological or even spiritual disorder (other than for those whose gender is biologically ambiguous), regardless of what professional health care workers choose to call it.

Otherwise, a person is whatever (or whoever) they perceive themselves to be—meaning that if I am absolutely convinced to the core of my being that I am a black female Viking and I have always felt that way about myself, then I am, in fact, a black female Viking, despite being a white male Jewish American.

Of course, just writing these words automatically puts me in the category of being a transphobic bigot, an insensitive hater who simply doesn’t understand—but no one ever said that speaking the truth would be popular, nor does one have to agree in order to understand.

The stark reality is quite simple, and as I have stated many times, once we depart from the divine foundations of “male and

female he created them" (Gen. 1:27), we open the door to anything, including 50 ways (why not 500 ways?) to describe your gender.

(For extensive documentation of many of the points raised here, see my book *A Queer Thing Happened to America*.)

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